

Employee Onboarding, Development, and Retention In Theatre

A Thesis

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Carlos Diaz

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Dedications

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my Mother who has always been my biggest fan, my Father who has taught me the importance of a good education and strong work ethic, my brothers, Jason and David, who have always pushed me to be the best I can, and Robert the most encouraging life partner who pushes me to aim higher and achieve greater every day. Thank you all.

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Abstract

This paper examines the Human Resource concepts of Employee Onboarding, Development, and Retention as they relate to the theater. Through an examination of current market research, scholarly sources, and an original qualitative survey this study sheds light on the lack of writing, research, and strong professional practice in these areas of Human Resources and attempts to answer the following questions: What role does HR play in regards to Employee Onboarding, Development and Retention in the theater? What practices are lacking in these areas? What HR practices do theater professionals feel are important to their work? This study concludes that many of your standard HR practices such as monitoring employee behavior, attendance, adherence to rules, even incident reporting, safety protocols, and emergency procedures all exist but are handle by Stage Managers and not Human Resource professionals. This study also concludes that theatre professionals find an organization's reputation, the content produced, and the organization's culture as key reasons for continued employment at any given theater.

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The Questions

The employee life cycle, or ELC, is a commonly known human resource model that identifies key points in an employee's career that allows human resource members to better guide their management and optimization of employee function within an organization (Rouse 2012). In conducting a brief search on the popular search engine, Google, you will find that in searching the phrase "The life cycle of an employee" Google will provide you with approximately 28,300,000 hits. This is quite an astounding number, but in refining the search terms further you will begin to find an interesting trend. By combining the phrases "The life cycle of an employee" and "non profits" your search results dwindle to a mere 3,380,000 hits, equating to a loss of 88.06 percent of resource material related to the employee life cycle (Google 2016). It should come as no surprise that when refining your search terms to focus on the non-profit sector the amount of information available to you would decrease so. After all, the concept of nonprofit organizations as a cohesive sector of business only dates back to the 1970s with over 90 percent of nonprofit organizations in existence today finding their inceptions since 1950 (Hall 2016). In condensing the search even more to look at information pertaining to the employee life cycle in the theater the results dwindle even further to 1,380,000 hits. Some may believe that this is a large number of resources to gather information, but looking through the hits that Google provides will show that the first five pages of hits, amounting to about 50 sources, are devoid of a single link that leads directly to information pertaining to the life cycle of an employee in the theater. These statistics are to help show that there

appears to be more attention paid to the for profit sector, and indeed a less robust focus on nonprofits and the theatre industry.

Joane E. Pynes, the writer of *Human Resources Management for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* 3rd edition, backs up this finding, however, by stating, “While the literature on nonprofit management has increased in recent years, little information exists that addresses nonprofit HRM concerns ... As more public administration programs offer a specialization in nonprofit management, it is important that resources be available to target the challenges that both the public and nonprofit sectors face (Pynes 2009).” If it is important to have a wealth of resources, as Pynes states, then why is it that there is so little information about the nonprofit sector? Even further, why is there less information about the theater industry in regards to the life cycle of an employee and sound human resource practices? What are the practices in human resources in this field related to employee hiring and onboarding, training and development, and employee retention? Why do I hear time and again how actors wish there was someone they could talk to not related to the production about their issues? These are the central foci of my thesis.

In the following examination of these questions I hope to show the importance of such questions in the field of arts administration in respect to the theater. I have worked at a number of small theater and arts organizations and have found that my experience with HR practices at small organizations has been less than favorable compared to my experience working at larger organizations. I was curious to see if there is a strong correlation in the effectiveness of human

resource practices and organization size, or if there is something more specific in the industry that creates these types of conditions. By looking at theatres of various sizes and prestige I hoped to gain an understanding of HR practices that may be different between these different organization sizes. I then hope to look at my findings and see what I may be able to glean about smaller arts organizations in general to see where relationships between theater and other arts organizations can be found.

There are numerous questions that could be asked when looking at hiring and onboarding, training and development, and employee retention. Some key questions I will examine in the subsequent study include: What role do HR professionals and the department play in regard to Employee Onboarding, Development and Retention in the theater? What practices are lacking in these areas? What HR practices do theater professionals feel are important to their work? By examining this aspect of business through these questions I hope to show that these areas of Human Resources are incredibly important, but lacking in the theatre industry. These questions are not new to the field, and I aim to contribute to recent information that has been developed in regards to these topics.

The 2015 Nonprofit Employment Practices Survey compiled by the organization Nonprofit HR is a study developed around current trends in the nonprofit sector in regards to employment, and the challenges presented to recruitment and retention. In the 2015 edition of this survey, which has been conducted every year since 2007, the researchers examine this question by

collecting information on nonprofit staffing, recruitment, and retention practices with a focus on staff size and projected growth, recruitment strategies and budgeting, and staffing challenges. The report concluded that there is an increase in staff size, an increase in turnover rate, and that most nonprofits do not have a formal recruitment strategy or budget set aside and those that do are large organizations (Nonprofit HR 2015). The study does not define what is meant by “large organization,” but the National Center for Charitable Statistics uses data from the IRS’s Exempt Organizations Business Master File that generates tables based on total assets or revenue and categorizes the industry into eight categories without cutoffs of: \$100K, \$250K, \$500K, \$1M, \$5M, \$10M, \$100M, and greater than \$100M (Hallman 2017). Their study was conducted through the combined use of multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and short answer questions and includes responses from 362 nonprofit organizations throughout the United States and Canada. The 2017 edition of this study looks at roughly 400 nonprofit organizations and focuses greatly on employee retention strategies. While both editions of this study were a great source of information for me, these samples are not even remotely representative. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, more than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations exist in the United States. This number, which includes public charities, private foundations, and other types of nonprofit organizations such as chambers of commerce, fraternal organizations and civic leagues shows how vast and varied the nonprofit sector is and proves even more so how small a number 362 or even 400 is when looking at the scope of the entire industry (Grant Space 2017).

Data Collection Methods

I originally believed that the most effective way for me to gather my data was going to be through conducting interviews and case studies with high level management at theaters and arts organizations. However, as I dove deeper into my research I discovered that all of the questions I had about these topics kept coming back to what I felt about the employee perspective. I decided that surveying a number of working arts related professionals about their experiences with the aforementioned HR practices I would glean a better picture of employee attitudes. As Human Resource functions are people focused in nature, it was important to my research to have people centered research methods. As evidenced by the amount of information gathered in the Employment Practices Survey, the survey format is one that can result in a wealth of information. I was also confident that in addition to scholarly materials, receiving a first hand account of HR practices from professionals in the field to shed light on the reality of HR practices in the nonprofit field would help paint a better picture of these practices. As organization size was a proposed factor in the difference in HR effectiveness, I conducted interviews with professionals who have worked at all sizes of theaters and arts organizations to compare and contrast HR functionality.

I anticipated that throughout my research I would find that most larger theaters do not have dedicated Human Resource staff for the actors, technicians, and artistic staff that work at the organizations, and that arts organizations with smaller budgets and less employees will likewise have a lack of effective HR staff. I also anticipated that I would find the reason for this is because of

budgeting concerns with hiring a full time Human Resource employee. For those organizations that do have someone that looks at HR related functions pertaining to hiring, training, and retention, I believe I will find that the quality of these areas suffer because the employee handling these functions is also responsible for multiple roles in their organization. I didn't anticipate finding a plethora of scholarly articles or published materials specifically discussing HR related functions in the theater industry, but believed I would find the most information about trends in the field from my interviews and surveys.

I created a ten question qualitative survey through SurveyMonkey.com that was distributed to 215 past and present theater professionals. Of these 215, 56 participants responded to my survey, which was sent electronically through a social media post. Much like the Non Profit Employment Survey referenced earlier, 56 responses are certainly far from representative of the larger group reached out to let alone the theater industry or nonprofit sector as a whole. This ten question survey, however, did begin to show what theater professionals opinions are of these areas of HR.

Research Limitations

The potential limitations of my research were numerous. One of the biggest limitations I could foresee was the actual scope of my question. I wanted to find data related to theater that I may be able to apply to all different kinds of theaters as well as the arts administration field as a whole, but in an attempt to focus in on the kind of information I was looking to receive I had to narrow down my focus to that of theaters primarily with a sprinkling of other arts organizations for comparison. Another potential limitation was found in my research method of surveying theater employees. Many arts organization employees are swamped with multiple job descriptions and responsibilities that, at times, it proved difficult to fit myself into their overwhelming business day to discuss these topics. My survey participants come from varied backgrounds in the theater and cover a wide range of ages and demographics. Approximately sixty percent of my participants, and the participants span across three decades with some being in the twenties, some in their thirties, and some in their forties. Some participants have been working professionally in the theatre for just a couple of years while others have had up to twenty years of experience. Almost all survey participants hold a theatre degree of some kind whether it be in acting, directing, or technical theatre. You will see further in the study the distribution of theatre professions held by these participants. A final challenge I faced in conducting the research was the lack of published and scholarly material that exists surrounding this topic. These challenges served as a great source of motivation to dig into these questions and seek out the answers to what I was curious about.

The Current Literature

The literature I found at the beginning of my research was incredibly informative and sparked further interest and a desire to continue looking into these research questions. Theatre Communications Group (TCG) is a national nonprofit organization for the advancement of American theatre. TCG offers its members networking and knowledge building opportunities through their conferences, events, research, and communications. They also advocate for theater on a federal level and through the Global Theater Initiative, TCG's partnership with the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics serves as the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute. (Theatre Communications Group n.d.) Victoria Nolan, a writer for TCG, wrote an article looking at best practices of human resources in which she looked specifically at models that would encourage communication, team building, conflict resolution and empowerment. Feedback was requested from those who had successfully implemented various HR programs, and out of all contacts that were made twelve theatres, three service organizations, one publishing company and one foundation agreed to participate. The researchers developed a series of questions on the rate of staff turnover, pay scales and benefits, employee background and training, work atmosphere, interaction with executive leadership, diversity, education and employee feedback (Nolan 2002). While this article was enough to spark further interest, it did not serve as a large enough wealth of information to dive further into these topics. Conversely, Brigg Patten, a writer for Training Industry, a company that spotlights the latest news, articles, case studies and best practices

within the training industry, did have an article that provided a deeper look at these issues. In Patten's article *The Good, Bad, and Ugly of Employee Training* he discusses some key components that organizations should consider when developing employee-training methods. These key components include: understanding the importance of training, presenting competitiveness, developing future continuity, designing effective training programs, and accessing training resources. Patten further mentions that smaller companies may not have the financial resources to hire an "in house" person, or persons, to execute an ongoing training effort. He offers up some solutions by recommending that smaller companies let affiliated vendors handle training on their products, or to make use of online resources that may be free or low cost (Patten 2016). This perspective was a great one to come across in my research as it confirmed some of my earlier hypotheses about budget being a factor in theaters having lacking HR practices.

In addition to organization budget, employee satisfaction and organization culture is a key component in the employee life cycle. NetGain Partners Inc., a consulting firm based out of Canada, conducted a study to identify small cultural organizations that have succeeded, to some degree, in implementing what they describe as "exemplary human resource management practices." For the purpose of this study, it was clarified that a "small" organization is one with five to twenty full time staff. The findings of this study were collected through in depth interviews and comparisons to best HR practices in other successful organizations both within and without the nonprofit sector. The study concludes that the positive qualities of HR-oriented managers are the following: They truly value

and respect the contributions and skills of their staff, they demonstrate that value and respect by acknowledging their good work, encouraging their efforts and involving them in organizational decision- making, they communicate constantly with their staff, and they recognize that people do not join cultural organizations for the money and need other reasons to stay (NetGain Partners, Inc. n.d.). This is not the only study putting forth this kind of conjecture. *Employers Undervalue What Keeps Employees Onboard*, written by Stephen Miller in September of 2016 pulls information from two previous surveys conducted looking at talent management and rewards. Based on the research conducted, Miller puts forth a chart of seven attraction drivers, and seven retention drivers that most employees consider when deciding to take a job or continue with a job. One of the conclusions made is the distinction between the employer and the employee in regards to employee advancement. It seems that employers and employees don't see eye to eye on this matter. Employers may be painting a picture of continued growth in the company, which may mean that the organization as a whole is on the upswing due to the economy, but an employee may perceive this as personal advancement opportunities, which isn't necessarily accurate (Miller 2016).

In her article, *Retention Challenges and Solutions for Non-Profit*, Alicia Schoshinski sheds some light on the topic of employee retention explaining that it is an ongoing process that, according to the 2013 Nonprofit Employment Trends Survey, nine out of ten organizations does not focus on during the day-to-day work in the company. Schoshinski states that everyone in the organization needs to be involved in the retention efforts, and that, ultimately, managers should be

the ones held accountable for retention efforts. One way she suggests to work towards this is by redefining recruitment strategies in a way that shifts the focus from employment to retention. By engaging a potential employee with the expressed mission of retaining them from the get-go, an organization can help make a stronger case to a prospective employee to accept a position. Another suggestion given is to focus on keeping employees engaged in their work and the organization they're doing the work for (Schoshinski 2013). I was a little skeptical about this approach at first during my research believing that making people feel important in the work that they do wouldn't be enough to actually retain employees for an extended amount of time. I wanted to find more information that would help me understand how these approaches would be put into practice and the benefits of following this model. I found part of my answer in the *2015 Workforce Purpose Index*. This study was conducted by Imperative, an organization that looks at purpose driven work in multiple industries through examining purpose drivers in the workplace and how they impact employee outcomes and organization effectiveness. Additionally, the study presents associated predictive indicators of performance and wellbeing that organizations can examine to promote employee satisfaction and more successful work outcomes. According to Imperative, the *Workforce Purpose Index* is the first comprehensive study of Purpose-Oriented Workers across the U.S. workforce. This Index provides the data to support the case that Purpose-Driven Workers are the foundation for successful organizations, a thriving economy, and healthy society overall. The study uses many graphics and data to show how different

parts of the employee life cycle can contribute to the successes of a purpose-driven employee, and also shows which industries see the largest number of purpose-driven employees (Imperative 2015). One key take away gained while researching employee retention came from the book *Rethinking Retention In Good Times and Bad: Breakthrough Ideas For Keeping Your Best Workers*. In it I found a surprisingly informative anecdote that helped me understand that one key factor of effective HR practices in employee onboarding, training, and retention is planning ahead. Finnegan, the author, states:

Imagine you are reading this book in the summer of 2007. Surrounded by a blazing economy, you would find data here regarding the high number of jobs versus workers across most industries as well as the challenges U.S. companies face to hire and retain good or even serviceable workers. But the U.S. economy made a hairpin turn near the end of 2007, moving from very healthy to officially in recession in a matter of months. This stark contrast of economies offers a good look at employees' quitting patterns during down economic times. For most of 2007, the U.S. economy was riding high and few economists were predicting danger ahead. The recession began in December of that year but wasn't officially announced until a full year later. During that 12-month lapse the United States became a different country. By the mid-point of 2008 the economy showed the following changes since year-end 2007:

- The Dow Jones Industrials had dropped more than 14%
- Inflation had increased over 4%
- Gas prices had shot up an even dollar
- The Consumer Confidence Index had fallen 44%

Major layoffs had increased by 22% compared to the same period of the previous year and had put nearly 1 million Americans out of work. These are the times when executives expect workers to hold onto their jobs (Finnegan 2011).

Had economists and Human Resource professionals worked together to focus on the impending recession some downward trends may have been avoided. With such a small focus on the nonprofit sector, however, I'm not sure some of

these trends would have been as successfully avoided. This is, in part, why I believe looking at Human Resource practices in the nonprofit sector is so important. While there are few scholarly articles specifically looking at Onboarding, Development, and Retention there are more than a handful of nonprofit and arts related journals such as the American Journal of Arts Management, Arts Journal, and the International Journal of Arts Management. In one such journal, The Non Profit Business Advisor, I found a wonderful article that beautifully connects my topics of Human Resources to the very specific field of theater. In the May 1, 2012 issue of this journal, are details of an interview with George Bradt, the managing director of PrimeGenesis, an executive and team onboarding firm, and author of *Onboarding*. In this article, Bradt is cited as likening the onboarding process to developing and coordination a theatrical performance. Bradt recommends that managers imagine themselves in the following three roles: The Producer, who is responsible for assembling all of the right resources (the cast, music, venue, materials, etc.) but also makes sure that all of the people involved work well together. The Director, whose job it is to tell people what to do and make sure that everyone involved knows what they have to deliver and clarifies expectations when needed. Bradt suggests that to act out this role, managers sit down with employees before the first day of work to draw up an Individual Onboarding Plan so that both know what to expect, what resources are required, and how they would work together as manager and employee. Lastly, as the Stage Manager whose job it is to work behind the scenes by bringing company managers and co-workers together in understanding a new

employee's responsibilities, providing the resources, guidance and support that the candidate will need to succeed (Nonprofit Business Advisor 2012). What I like most about this analogy, and what Bradt confesses is his favorite part as well, is that the Producer, Director, and Stage Manager are never on stage. They don't do the work for the new employee, they instead work behind the scenes to ensure that new employees have everything they need to be successful in their new positions. Bradt believes that onboarding a new employee is one of the most important leadership crucibles there is. In his mind, it's not possible to be a good leader in any organization without paying attention to onboarding, because the more you pay attention to it, the better a leader you will be (Nonprofit Business Advisor 2012).

After finding all of this information regarding employee retention and training as well as reading about Bradt's beliefs on the importance of onboarding I began to understand better how all of these factors work together to create a strong environment of effective HR practices, but none of this information helped me understand how to get those employees to work for you in the first place, or what makes them stay once they've started working there, nor did it explain why many actors and theater technicians feel like there is no HR presence for them in the workplace. This is where my field research came in.

Field Research and Findings

In conducting my field research I wanted to get to the heart of what role human resources plays in the world of the theater. I've personally been involved in the theater for the past seventeen years in a wide range of jobs, and I have never worked in a theatre with a dedicated HR professional. Something I learned during my Undergraduate time at West Chester University of Pennsylvania that I continued to reflect on throughout my research is something I was told while Assistant Stage Managing a production of Macbeth by William Shakespeare. The director for the production decided to conceptualize the show and place the story in Iraq during our modern time of war. This concept brought with it a lot of design challenges including the incorporation of stage firearms. When using firearms on stage there is a strict process of permitting, training, checking, and rechecking the weapon to make sure that there is no way it can cause harm to an actor or actress on stage. When using blank bullets, which our production did, the rules are even more stringent. "Who is in charge of making sure these rules and guidelines are followed? What happens if someone does get hurt?" I wondered. It turns out that almost every theater places this responsibility on the shoulders of the Stage Manager. But why is it that this is the case? How was it decided the Stage Manager would be responsible? What other duties are expected of this position, and what is the purpose of this position in relation to other positions in the theater? I found many of my answers in documents put forth by Actor's Equity.

Actor's Equity Association, AEA or Equity for short, is the U.S. labor Union representing more than 50,000 Actors and Stage Managers. Founded in 1913, Equity seeks to foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of society and advance the careers of its members by negotiating wages, working conditions and providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans (Actor's Equity Association 2017). Equity has a wealth of documents and information about their benefits, programs, rules, and guidelines. The document I found most useful in looking at the role of the Stage Manager was the Stage Manager Packet for Information, Reports, and Forms. The general information page at the beginning of the packet has a lot of general guidelines that sound strikingly similar to what you would expect of a Human Resource professional.

Human Resource Management (HRM), as defined by Joan E. Pynes, is the design of formal systems in an organization to ensure the effective use of employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics to accomplish organizational goals. She goes on to explain that HRM concerns the recruitment, selection, training and development, compensation and benefits, retention, evaluation, and promotion of employees, and labor-management relations within an organization (Pynes 2009). Labor management relations is the area of human resource management where I noticed a similarity between theaters and other organizations.

The Labor Management Relations Act (LMRA), commonly known as the Taft-Hartley Act, is an amendment made to the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) in 1947 that serves two primary purposes. The act is meant to lessen

industrial disputes and, secondly, to place employers in a more equal position with the unions in bargaining and labor relation procedures (Society for Human Resource Management 2012). It appears, based on the information in the Stage Management Packet, that Equity's solution to this is to place the Stage Manager in the position of middleman between the union, Equity, and the employer, the theater.

In the section of AEA's Stage Manager Packet describing the Stage Manager's Weekly Report it says the following:

In the event of a breach or infraction of Equity Rules by either Actor or Manager, the Stage Manager shall furnish Equity a record of the violation on the proper enclosed form. Many Managers have complained about infractions of rules by Actors that seem too minor to report to Equity, such as tardiness at rehearsals or performances, improper care of costumes, and taking liberties with the direction during performance. Until now, the Stage Manager has been somewhat hampered in dealing with these problems as the discipline of Equity Members must ultimately remain with Equity. We hope that the Stage Manager's Weekly Report will truly reflect the actual conduct of both Actors and Managers at your theatre, and will assist you in performing your duties.

This shows that employee behavior, attendance, and lack of adherence to rules rest initially with the Stage Manager. Furthermore, AEA increases Stage Manager responsibilities by placing the responsibility of injury reporting on their shoulders as well:

For insurance purposes, it is imperative that any and all accidents or injuries sustained during the course of rehearsals and/or performances be carefully noted in writing, reported to the Manager, and to the Worker's Compensation Insurance Carrier on the required Insurance Report Form. The Actor should be also made aware of his rights under the Rule titled Illness and Injury, and the proper forms filed. Please report all accidents or injuries to Equity on the back of your Stage Manager's Weekly Report Forms. Also, please be sure the Deputy fills out the Accident Report Form included in the Deputy kit. Actors should not use an Equity Insurance Form in the event of an accident or injury on the job.

In addition to these worker responsibilities that the Stage Manager is

responsible for there are also general working conditions that the Stage Manager is tasked with reporting throughout the rehearsal and performance process. These forms, found in the Stage Manager Packet, include the Theatrical Smoke and Haze Report which requires you to supply information such as the manufacturer of the Smoke/Haze Machine, the machine name and quantity being used, the name of the fluid used in creating the smoke/haze, any additional attachments used, the location of the machines, and what setting the machines are used on. The report also asks the stage manager to fill out information about where the actors are on stage when the machine goes off, and how to test the machine appropriately prior to use. Other forms furnished in the Stage Manager Packet include: a Grievance Form, Theatrical Firearms Questionnaire, Report of TV News Taping/Filming, information for posting in the theater regarding stunts, notices of terminations, Emergency Procedures, Earthquake Readiness, Tax Information for Actors and Stage Managers, procedures for Work-Sustained Accidents, and Rights and Responsibilities when Injured While Working. From personal experience I'm also aware that the Stage Manager is sometimes responsible for managing employee sign in and sign out to track hours worked, and is also responsible for notating all script changes, blocking (where everyone goes on the stage during scenes), and choreography.

Reflecting on the responsibilities of the Stage Manager it is clear that many of these human resource functions are executed by this vital position, but they're not the sole person responsible for these, and this packet only applies to those productions that are being produced at Equity designated theaters. What are

the appropriate procedures for a community theater, or a regional theater? How do these differentiating sizes and prestige affect the roles of the stage manager? The answer to these questions are complicated ones and every theater has the opportunity to split job responsibilities differently, but from my experience, and from the experience of those I surveyed, the following appears to be true.

In Equity affiliated theaters it actually becomes the joint responsibility of the Stage Manager and the Equity Deputy to oversee all of these employee relations functions. The Equity Deputy serves as the liaison between the cast and the Union. They take actor concerns to the Stage Manager, fill out paperwork to help keep Equity informed about the production, act as the mediator in disputes with the producers, may be called upon to organize secret ballots amongst the cast about any contract concessions, and act as a cast leader of sorts (Actress 2013). In an Equity production it is the Deputy's responsibility to record all rehearsal and performance hours for the week, which gets sent weekly to the Union to be reviewed for overtime payments. Additionally, they assist in the paperwork for TV News Taping and Filming, the filing of Grievances, and the Safety and Sanitary report for the building (Actor's Equity Association n.d.). Between the Deputy and the Stage Manager most of the labor relations portion of Human Resource Management is accounted for, but what of recruitment, selection, training and development or compensation and benefits, or even retention efforts and promotions? These topics rely strongly on the type of position you are in. If you are looking to be an actor, the recruitment and selection process in the audition and subsequent casting, or lack thereof. The training and development is

the rehearsal process, and the compensation is typically decided on by the Producer and Company Manager either as a flat rate for the whole production, a payment schedule of some kind, or a salary determined by the AEA. All other jobs in the theater are handled similarly to other business jobs with a formal application and resume submission process followed by interviews and a job offer typically with a salary attached. Now knowing what systems are in place to provide Human Resource related functions, what do these theater professionals think, and why?

In conducting my research I reached out to roughly 200 working theater professionals from across all different areas of the theater. Out of the 200 that I reached out to, I received responses from 56. There were almost equal amount of different job as there were participants, coming out with 54 different positions in the theatre that these participants have held. The most common jobs that these participants held were Actor (23 participants), Assistant Stage Manager (10 participants), Director (9 participants) and Stage Manager and Assistant Director (equally 8 participants.)

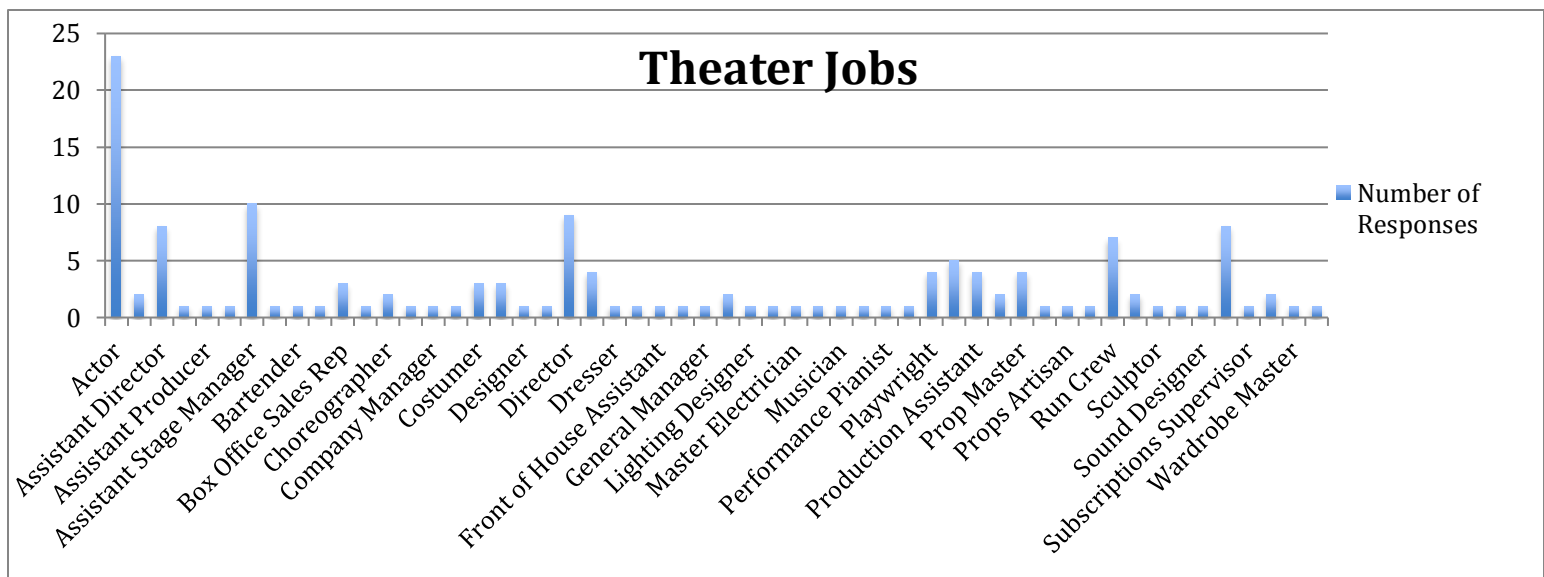


Figure 1: Analysis of Theatre Jobs held by survey respondents.

A majority of these participants still work in the theater today, which helped give me a picture of how the written research applies practically to the field. In conducting my research the following questions were asked:

<p>Q1</p> <p>Please list the positions you have held in the theater.</p>
<p>Q2</p> <p>Do you currently work in the theater?</p>
<p>Q3</p> <p>According to the Society for Human Resource Management, Employee Onboarding is described as a process that should acclimate the new employee to allow him or her to become a contributing member of the staff in the briefest period possible, while engaging the employee to enhance productivity and improve the opportunity for the company to retain the employee. To what extent have you experienced Employee Onboarding in your theatre jobs?</p>
<p>Q4</p> <p>In your theatre jobs, have the organizations you've worked for provided continued development in regards to job skills and knowledge?</p>
<p>Q5</p> <p>A dedicated Human Resource Professional is typically responsible for: employee training, compensation and benefits, maintaining and updating employee handbooks, coordinating with payroll, and organizing staff training and professional development initiatives; Do you believe there is a need for a dedicated Human Resource Professional in each theater?</p>
<p>Q6</p> <p>Have you worked at a theater with a dedicated Human Resource Professional?</p>
<p>Q7</p> <p>If yes, briefly describe a situation in which the Human Resource Professional was able to assist you. If no, briefly describe a situation in which a Human Resource Professional would have been helpful, and identify who did help.</p>

<p>Q8</p> <p>What motivates you to continue working at any given theater? Select all that apply.</p>
<p>Q9</p> <p>In your experience, have you found that employee relations, employee development, and employee retention have been better at smaller theaters with less staff, or larger theaters with more staff?</p>
<p>Q10</p> <p>Would you like to be contacted for a further discussion regarding your answers to be used anonymously in my published thesis?</p>

Table 1: Questions administered to survey participants.

I wanted to make sure my questions reflected every portion of the ELC so as to get a holistic view of these participants' feelings about where the industry is at the moment in regards to these topics. In examining the responses from Q3 I was surprised with the results of the survey. A majority of the participants said that in their previous theater positions they were given a little bit of employee onboarding. While going through the data a little more thoroughly I found a very interesting trend in these 29 participants that said they only received a little bit of onboarding. There was as even a split as possible between those participants that felt they received a little bit of onboarding who also felt that in their experience, employee relations, employee development, and employee retention were better working at a small theater (14 responses), and those that felt their experience, employee relations, employee development, and employee retention were better working at a large theater (15 responses). I looked at the correlation here further and found that out of the 56 participants, the responses to Q9 were very close to a split down the middle. 27 participants altogether felt that they received better

Human Resources from smaller theaters with less staff and 29 felt they received better Human Resources from larger theaters with more staff. This further exemplifies how complicated this topic is, and how Human Resources in this field is not a “one size fits all” concept.

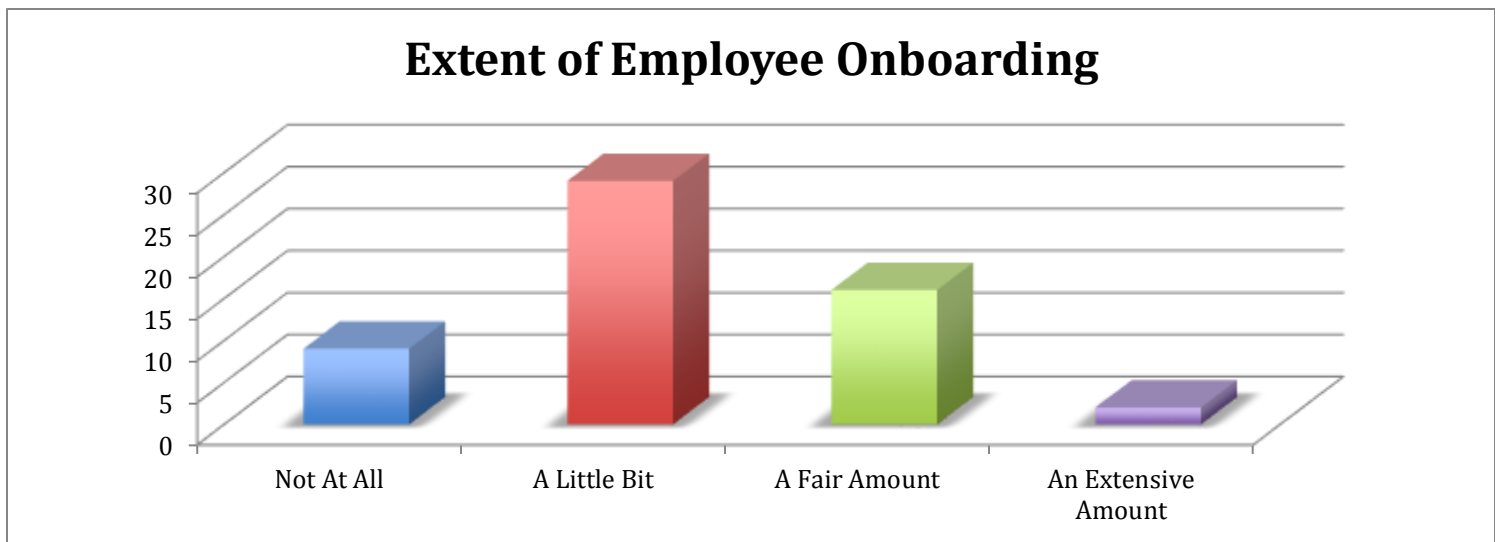


Figure 2: Extent of Employee onboarding received in theater jobs held.

Comparing my findings to the 2017 Nonprofit Employment Practices Survey put forth by Nonprofit HR I found something very interesting that may bring some legitimacy to the representation of my data versus that of a larger sampling. As mentioned previously, this iteration of the survey gathered data from 400 nonprofits. It was found that roughly 90 percent of participants had either a formal onboarding/orientation process or an informal one in the nonprofit field as a whole. This is roughly in line with the data found in my research, which shows that about 80 percent of my participants have experienced a little bit or a fair amount of onboarding in their theatre jobs. The figure detailing this data can be found below.

Does your organization have an onboarding/orientation process? 2017

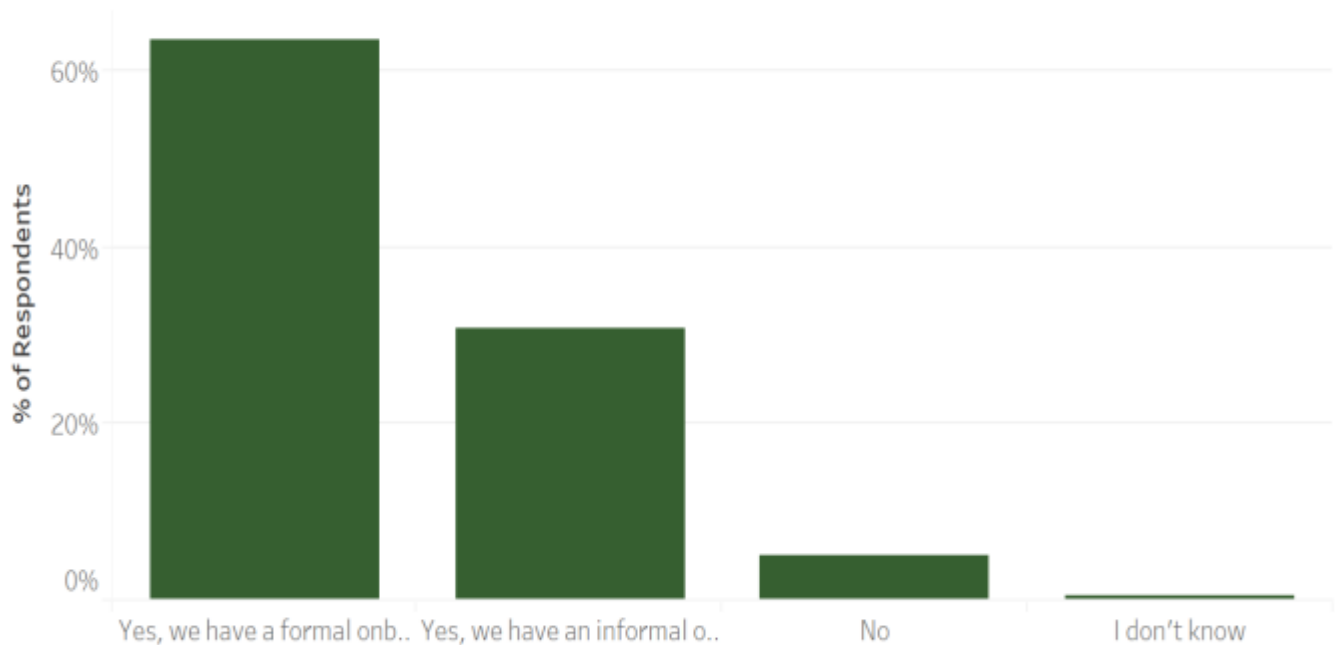


Figure 3: Data collected from the 2017 Nonprofit Employment Survey.
Courtesy of nonprofit HR. <https://www.nonprofithr.com/2017-nep-survey-new/>

Further examining the data by looking at Q4 more light is shed on this complicated concept of HR in the theater. 30 participants stated that they received no further development in regards to job skills and knowledge, leaving 26 participants stating that they did receive further training of some kind while employed in the theater. These skills ranged from new acting techniques to learning how to use database software more effectively. It is interesting to see how many people did receive some kind of continued development in their time working at a theater, but what is more interesting is how many of these participants shared their desire for a dedicated Human Resource Professional at the theaters they work at. Out of the 56 participants, 48 of them felt that theaters should have a dedicated HR professional. Some of the comments shared by those

that said they did not think this was necessary felt this kind of position is heavily reliant on the size and budget of the organization. One participant stated:

“I don’t think that this is a necessary position at every individual theater – especially small ones. But I do think that there could be more transparent and available services for actors (especially actors) to become aware of the types of HR things they should expect, look for, or how to troubleshoot problems when they arise. For example, most actors I encounter don’t even understand the difference between a W-9 and W-2 Employee and how this affects them.”

This participant makes some great points about services that are typically the duties and responsibilities of the Human Resource personnel that should still be made readily available to workers. There was much feedback supporting the need for a dedicated HR professional in the theater. Some comments that really speak to the necessity of this position are as follows:

“I think a Human Resource Professional in every job setting is important. From a theatre perspective I think it’d be important for building members a better relationship between theatre professionals and the theatre. It could help build more knowledge of what employees are capable of and potentially lead to grooming an employee to a specific role much needed in the theatre. It could also help a theatre understand why they’re losing the employees they have, if that’s the case. Some theatres have a bad rap and it could be because of simple things that could be fixed with a human resource professional on the team.”

“Theatre is a business, and most businesses operate with a staff dedicated to HR, even if just one person. There needs to be someone responsible for enforcing policies and procedures as well as acting as a representative of both the company and the employees.”

“It’s incredibly important for everyone to be on the same page in any work environment, but especially in the theatre. With the use of mission statements and creative vision, I think it’s essential to have that main person in charge during (and after) the on-boarding steps. A theatre is a business after all, and delegation is important, and having one person in charge of specific areas can cut down on things getting muddled.”

“Just like a union, an HR rep is there to make sure both the company and the employees are being provided for in the best way possible. Communication is

key in theatre and having an HR rep keep an open dialogue between the business side and artistic side is imperative for a successful theatre.”

In every one of these participant comments we keep hearing about the benefits of an HR professional in clarifying communications, enforcing policies, and building up the employees relationship with the theater, but merely having good communication and a good relationship with the theater isn’t always enough to make staff stay. Returning to the 2017 Nonprofit Employment Practices Survey for a comparison of my survey data I found another interesting implication for the field at large. Despite the fact that over half of my participants said they received no further training or development in their theater jobs, out of the 400 participating organizations involved in the Employment Practices Survey, only six percent, or 24 organizations, were arts, culture, and humanities organizations. However, this six percent surpassed every other type of organization in reporting the presence of a retention strategy. In comparing the feelings of my survey participants compared to the data collected from the Employment Practices Survey I thought it important to dive into what retention drivers do keep people happily employed in a theater.

Retention Strategy by Organization Type 2017

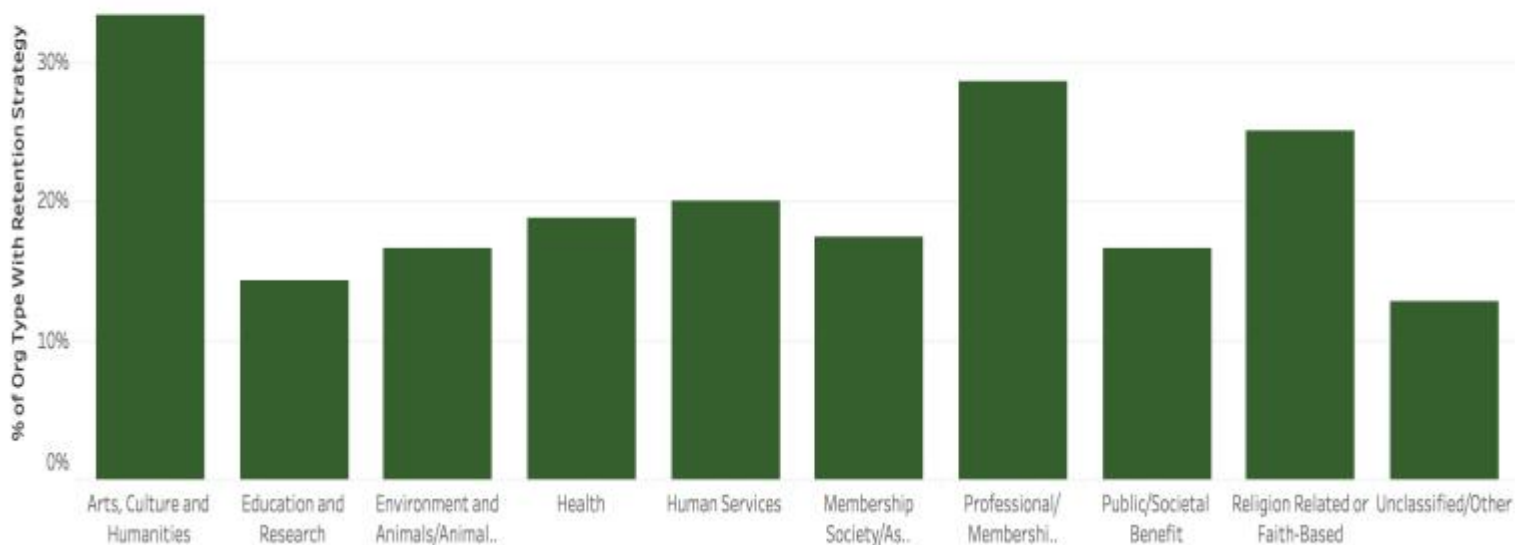


Figure 4: Retention Strategy Data Collected from the 2017 Nonprofit Employment Survey. Courtesy of nonprofit HR.
<https://www.nonprofithr.com/2017-nep-survey-new/>

Reflecting back on the retention drivers mentioned in Stephen Miller's article I wanted to see which of the drivers were important to theater professionals as well.

Rank	Attraction Drivers	Retention Drivers
1	Base pay/salary	Base pay/salary
2	Job security	Career advancement opportunities
3	Career advancement opportunities	Physical work environment
4	Challenging work	Job security
5	Opportunities to learn new skills	Ability to manage work-related stress
6	Reputation of the organization	Relationship with supervisor/manager
7	Health and wellness benefits	Trust/confidence in senior leadership

Table 2: Attraction and Retention Drivers as examined in Stephen Millers *Employers Undervalue What Keeps Employees Onboard*.

In conducting my research I had expected to see that the answer to Q8, what motivates you to continue working at any given theater, would result in the same ordering as Millers list of attraction and retention drivers. I was quite certain that I would find that base pay/salary at the very top of the list of reasons why theater professionals stay working at the theaters they find work in. It was eye opening to see that the top two focuses for my participants were the Organization's Reputation and the Content Produced. It appears that, like most nonprofit employees, even theater employees value organizations that provide a positive emotional return more than those that provide a positive monetary return. In fact, monetary compensation was number four out of the six possible responses to the question. Reputation, Content, and Culture all came above the desire for high monetary compensation, adequate training, or additional benefits.

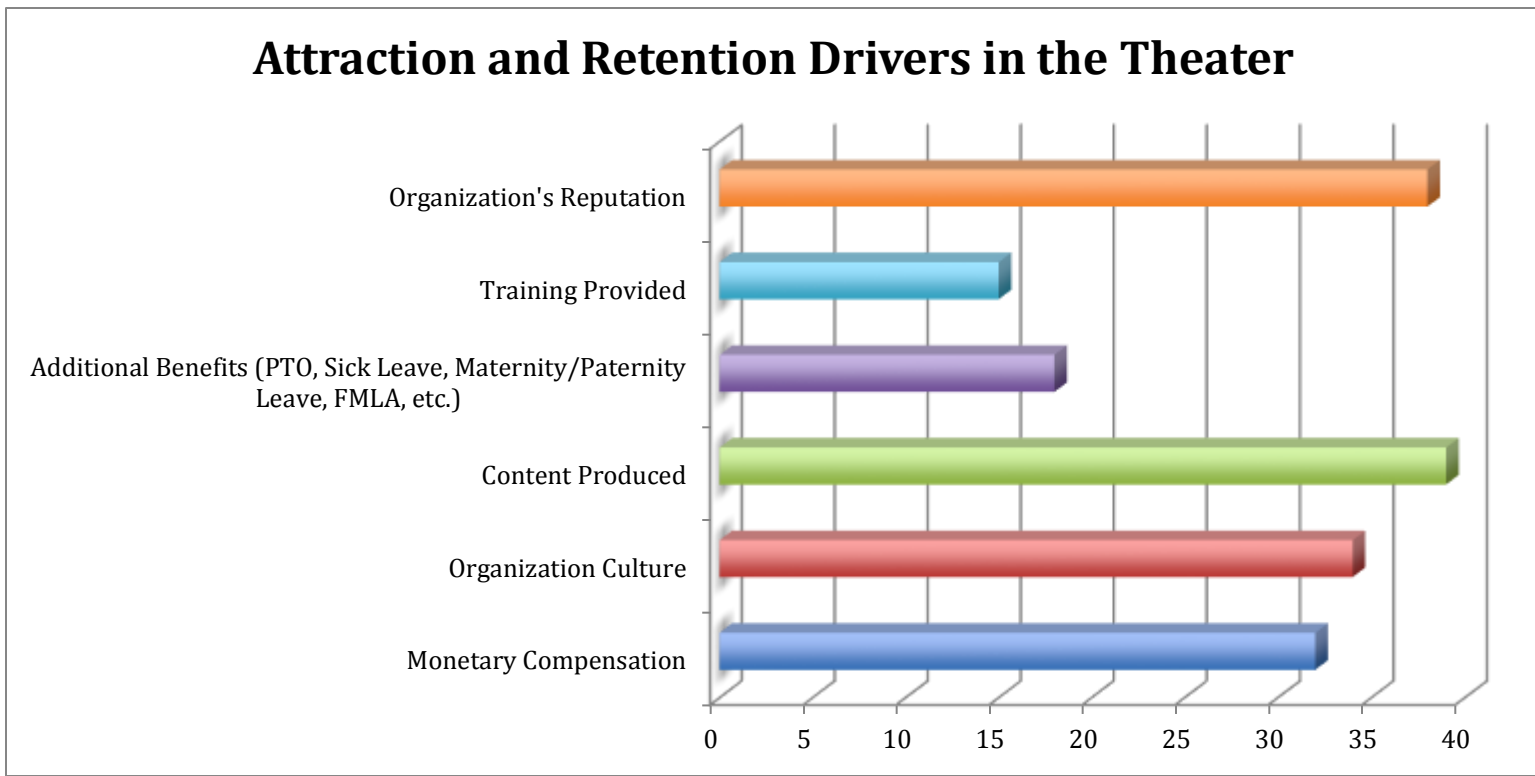


Figure 5: Attraction and Retention Drivers in the Theater

Conclusion and Call to Action

I set out to find what practices are in place in regards to Employee Onboarding, Development, and Retention in the theater and found that my research has barely begun to scratch the surface of these incredibly deep questions about what role Human Resources plays in the theater industry. I discovered that while a wealth of knowledge isn't easily accessible about these topics that there are publications like the Nonprofit Business Advisor, American Journal of Arts Management, Arts Journal, and the International Journal of Arts Management trying feverishly to research these topics and present meaningful data for the field. Additionally, I discovered that while arts, culture, and humanities nonprofits may be the most open with sharing their retention strategies there are still arts professionals that feel retention efforts aren't being made in the jobs they're finding. Even more fascinating is this perpetuated notion of emotional gain outweighing that of a monetary one when it comes to working in the arts. I discovered that it was important for theater professionals to work for organizations with a good reputation, strong pieces of work, and a positive organizational culture above monetary compensation. Does this feeling of personal gain come from the nonprofit field itself, or does it come a dedicated Human Resources team that strives to make the work place one of harmony, equality, and fairness for both employee and employer? What role do Actor's Equity Association and other theater union groups play in this complicated puzzle of Human Resource/Employee interaction? These questions warrant further research and critical questioning in the nonprofit field today. They require

dedicated organizations like Nonprofit HR and Grant Space, and professionals in the field like George Bradt who is willing to ask the difficult questions about workplace efficiency in regards to onboarding and management. There is far too little literature about these topics, and those that exist have merely named the issue, but we have much further to go if we are to find the solutions. It is my hope that through this study and other developing research that we will begin to see a more concerted effort by industry experts in bolstering the uses of Human Resource Management in the theater and other nonprofit organizations throughout the country.

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